

Michaud Announces Approval of Rare STB Field Hearing on Rail Road Line Abandonment

Friday, March 12 2010

Surface Transportation Board responds to Michaud's request for a hearing in Maine on MMA Railway Abandonment

WASHINGTON, DC ‐ Today, Congressman Mike Michaud praised the decision by the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to hold a public hearing in the State of Maine on the application of the Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway for authority to discontinue rail service and abandon rail lines. According to an STB spokesperson, it is very rare that these field hearings are held.

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Michaud sent a letter on March 4th with Congressman James Oberstar, Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, to the STB requesting the hearing. A copy of that letter can be found below.

“With this hearing, the Surface Transportation Board will hear firsthand just how devastating this action could be for Maine's economy,” Michaud said. “Many Maine businesses rely on freight rail service, and it would be a major economic setback for the entire state if these lines are abandoned. It's crucial that Mainers have a chance to illustrate the significant impact that abandonment will have on our state.”

According to the STB, the agency decided to hold a public hearing in Maine to allow citizens and stakeholders to provide testimony on the effect of the proposed abandonment. The hearing will be scheduled before the end of May, and the STB will announce details on the exact time and place for the hearing in the near future.

In October 2009, Michaud met with Chairman Oberstar, representatives from the Surface Transportation Board and Federal Railroad Administration and a group of businesses and organizations that rely on the Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway to discuss the effects that abandonment would have on the region. Michaud promised to work closely with the Surface Transportation Board and Federal Railroad Administration to ensure that there was a fair, transparent process in which all parties had an opportunity to be heard.

The STB is an economic regulatory body that Congress charged with the fundamental missions of resolving railroad rate and service disputes and reviewing proposed railroad mergers. The STB serves as both an adjudicatory and a regulatory body. Among other things, the agency has jurisdiction over railroad rate and service issues and rail restructuring transactions, including mergers, line sales, line construction, and line abandonments.

The letter Michaud sent with Chairman Oberstar on March 4th can be found below.

Chairman Daniel R. Elliot III

Surface Transportation Board

395 E St., SW

Washington, DC 20423

Dear Chairman Elliot:

We are writing today to request a public hearing in the State of Maine on the "Application of the Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway, Ltd. for Authority to Discontinue Rail Service and Abandon Rail Lines." The abandonment, as proposed, will have an impact on numerous industries and communities throughout Penobscot and Aroostook Counties. It is absolutely imperative that the individuals that will be affected by the discontinuation of rail service have an opportunity to be heard by the Surface Transportation Board (STB).

According to the Maine Department of Transportation (DOT), the abandonment would adversely affect 22 active shippers, as well as other businesses, throughout a region that already faces significant impediments to economic development. As the Montreal, Maine & Atlantic moves forward with the abandonment process, it is essential that the STB take the time to fully consider the impact that the decision will have on established businesses and broader development efforts throughout northern Maine. A field hearing will guarantee that every Mainer has an opportunity to present the full effect of the abandonment to the STB.

On October 29, 2009, we had an opportunity to discuss the abandonment with representatives from the Federal Railroad Administration, Maine DOT and some of the businesses and organizations that rely on continued freight rail service in Maine's Second Congressional District. During the meeting, you assured everyone present that the abandonment process would be both open and accessible. Holding a hearing in the state is the most effective way to make sure certain that this occurs.

We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of this request and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Michael H. Michaud

Member of Congress

James L. Oberstar

Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

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